

IX.—Letters, Extracts, and Notes.

The Steamer Duck.

SIR,—May I be allowed space for a few remarks on the Steamer Duck with reference to Mr. Blaauw's recent paper ('Ibis,' 1916, p. 478) on South American *Anatidæ*?

To recapitulate: this Duck, discovered in 1582 by Pedro Samiento, and noted by other travellers as Race-horse Duck, Loggerhead Duck, etc., was finally given its name, *Anas cinerea*, by Gmelin in 1788.

Captain King in 1830 separated the species into a volant and a non-volant form (P. Z. S. p. 15), and the former became known as *patachonicus*, the latter as *brachypterus*. Since then the volant form has been subjected to criticism from various sources. Cunningham (Tr. Zool. Soc. vii. 1871, pp. 493-501) was satisfied that only one species existed, and made the suggestion that the flying birds were adolescent individuals. He worked out the theory by skeleton material. Captain Abbot found a volant individual nesting, so that it was apparent that on Dr. Cunningham's theory adolescent Steamer Ducks nested before maturity. The Princeton Expedition to Patagonia, after a careful study of the specimens in the British and French Museums, came to the conclusion that Cunningham was right in so far as only one species of *Tachyeres* existed; they thought that the young birds did not attain full plumage until the second, and perhaps the third, year of life, and that the first breeding was probably accomplished in the phase of plumage called *patachonicus* by Oustalet. They did not meet with the Steamer Duck themselves, and added nothing new to our knowledge of the species.

Pässler (Ornith. Monatsbr. 1909, p. 103) noted flying Steamer Ducks on the west coast in the vicinity of Chiloe. He tells us that these Ducks can and do fly for a short distance when cornered by boats against the land. He saw flights of 500 to 1000 metres.

Blaauw (Notes Leyden Mus. xxxv. 1912, p. 47) again

returned to the theory of two species. He concluded that young birds could not fly at all, and that the volant individuals were really different in size and plumage from the non-volant. He has repeated these observations in 'The Ibis' for July, 1916.

It so happens that Mr. W. S. Brooks has only recently returned from the Falkland Islands in the interest of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Cambridge, Mass. At my request he paid particular attention to Steamer Ducks, and had ample opportunity to observe and shoot them and handle a large series of specimens. I have been carefully over his journal, and think that some of his observations may be of interest at this time. The Falkland Island natives speak of the flying Steamer Duck as a "canvas-back," but say such Ducks are rare. Mr. Brooks was convinced that certain individuals do fly, although he did not see the performance himself. He feels certain that the adolescent theory is wrong.

I extract freely from a letter of his, dated August 14, 1916 :—"Blaauw's *T. cinereus* has the orange-yellow bill in both sexes. Of all the breeding birds seen by me (in the Falklands) no female has a bill of this colour, and yet in the Falklands I have no reason to doubt that some of them can fly, for all the natives with whom I discussed the subject agreed in this and referred to the flying form as the 'canvas-back,' a bird supposed to be lighter and more bleached in appearance.

"Now Blaauw's flying bird he claims is smaller, and the female has a brown or black bill, similar to the Falkland Islands birds in which flight is a great exception. Falkland Islands birds also usually carry the tail upright, a character which Blaauw gives for *patuchonicus*. On the same page he states that he has seen these birds flying about the seashore, as well as lakes.

"I have frightened hundreds of them, but never saw anything nearer actual flight than the body clear of the water except the feet.

"A male I took on February 5 at Port Stephens, W. F.,

being frightened in a small waterhole near the shore, nearly cleared the ground in its efforts to escape; I think it could have done so had there been a favourable slope.

“On January 20, at Port Stephens, a flock of these birds on being frightened showed all stages of progress from the flapping of a young Sheldrake to merely the feet touching.

“Blaauw’s paper does not convince one; in fact, *we are worse off than ever*. His *T. patachonicus* agrees in appearance with the only birds (perhaps thousands) that I saw on the Falklands. His *T. cinereus*, with orange-yellow bill in both sexes, perhaps does not exist at all. Is it not very rare in Ducks sexually unlike in colour to both have the yellow bill which so often characterizes the male?

“I rather doubt if these birds can ever be satisfactorily differentiated, for it seems to me that this species is in the midst of its transition from a flying to a non-flying form, as in the Falklands it certainly exhibits every stage from mere flapping to flights from the nest to the water, probably not greatly exceeding half a mile. It would surprise me if a satisfactory line could be drawn anywhere. Obviously the flying birds are greatly in the minority throughout its range, and if more exist in Tierra del Fuego and southern Patagonia, it may be because it has become necessary in a region where for ages they have had primitive man and other natural enemies to contend with.”

Now in summing up my own opinion, which is only an opinion, and no better than another’s, I might add that more work has got to be done in regions where the flying birds can be found easily. Salvadori in the British Museum Catalogue quoted G. E. Cox (Annals de la Universidad de Chili, 1863) as to the presence of large numbers of flying Steamer Ducks in several Andean lakes. So far as I know, this observation has not been verified, but a search through Chilean literature might bring out some interesting points.

First, then, I should think that the theory of Dr. Cunningham, which connects volant power with adolescence, must certainly go by the board.

Second. Volant Steamer Ducks appear to be more

common on the mainland and on Tierra del Fuego than on the Falklands.

Third. The power of flight may be associated with a different size and different plumage, but this fact has not been clearly demonstrated.

Fourth. The Falkland Island Steamer Ducks are well differentiated as to sex. The males are large and light coloured (apparently getting lighter with age) and have yellow bills (at least in the breeding-season). The females are smaller, browner, and have dark bills.

Fifth. The species seems to be on the border-land as concerns its power of flight. Even in non-flying birds there is a marked variation in the ability to use the wings.

J. C. PHILLIPS.

Wenham, Mass., U.S.A.
28 August, 1916.

Birds at the Front.

SIR,—You may be interested to hear that in a wood in which there were no plants left on the ground, and no leaves on what remained of the trees except for a few stool-shoots thrown out by some, I was yet able to observe the following birds on one day (Sept. 7):—Blackbird, Thrush, Chaffinch, Great Tit, Jay, Hedge-Sparrow, Starling, Magpie, Swallow, and Hobby. The last four were only flying over. The Thrush and Blackbird I heard at dawn and the others shortly afterwards, in a remarkably welcome time of quiet which the Germans allowed us for a few hours; the Jays were a pair which came through the bare trees in the afternoon. The Great Tit and Hedge-Sparrow I had heard there two days before, so they were evidently remaining in what had been their wood. One of the Chaffinches flew poorly and had a hoarse call-note: perhaps it had got shell-shock.

In my present position I am able to watch migration most mornings: a fortnight ago there were Yellow Wagtails and Tree-Pipits with the Meadow-Pipits, but now the chief

other species are Linnet, Tree-Sparrow, and Chaffinch, which go over in their usual small parties.

The great majority of the Swallows appear to have left here about the 25th of September.

Yours faithfully,

C. J. ALEXANDER, Pte.

(2nd Queen's).

8 October, 1916.

Australian Subspecies.

SIR,—I would like to give a short explanation in connection with the letter from my good friend Edwin Ashby in the October 'Ibis,' pp. 664-665. He has suggested that subspecies were superfluous and that geographical variants were only recognisable. But "subspecies" is the short name for a "geographical variant," so that we are actually in agreement. Further, he wrote:—"Personally I think that this being the case, *Rhipidura rufifrons* should stand for the whole series as if this had not been accepted." Yet in my 'List of the Birds of Australia,' published in 1913, I had taken up this standpoint, and if Mr. Ashby will refer he will see it consistently used. Again he quotes the case of "*Pardalotus affinis*" Gould as being of a different nature, stating: "I have not met with any intermediate forms." These, however, have been recorded by more than one worker, and I have such in my collection.

I should just like to add that I have concluded that the value of subspecies is almost negligible in Australian Ornithology. In the Palæarctic Region they may be useful, but even here I think that they have been much overrated; while if large series are examined from Australia very many subspecific forms can be differentiated, but larger series always link most extreme cases up very quickly. Consequently in my 'Birds of Australia' I have depreciated subspecies even as advised by Mr. Ashby in his letter, but this course was adopted nearly two years ago.

Yours faithfully,

GREGORY M. MATHEWS.

Foulis Court,

Fair Oak, Hants.

23 November, 1916.

Swedish Ornithology.

SIR,—The Swedish novelist and bird-enthusiast, Mr. Bengt Berg, has recently published some books on ornithology which, though written in Swedish and therefore not within the easy reach of the English public, still are worthy of being noticed in 'The Ibis.'

These books, which bear the titles 'Tåkern' * and 'Stora Karlsô' are, however, some of the most splendid books which have lately been published in Swedish relating to the ornithology of the country.

At the Swedish Province of Östergôthland a small lake named Tåkern constitutes a famous resort for different kinds of water-birds. Mr. Berg's publication gives an ample and exhaustive account of the bird-life of this interesting lake during the spring, and his accounts, which are written in a way easily understood by non-professionals, are accompanied by numbers of most beautiful photographs of birds in their wild state. The greatest number of the photographs are devoted to the birds, but several others show the vegetation and the natural conditions around the lake. In my opinion the most beautiful pictures are those illustrating the different manner and behaviour of our Common Swan (*Cygnus olor*) when flying.

The nidification and behaviour of the Marsh-Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) are also subjects for several excellent pictures.

In the other book, 'Stora Karlsô,' Mr. Berg also gives a detailed account of the bird-life on this interesting island, which constitutes the only known breeding-place of the Common Guillemot (*Uria troille*) in the Baltic. The photographs in this volume are quite as good as those of 'Tåkern,' and in the text the reader will get several highly interesting biological observations about the different kinds of birds breeding on the island.

As a matter of fact both the volumes ought to be found on the book-shelf of every ornithologist, and the author is

* For a notice *vide* 'Ibis,' 1916, p. 646.

to be highly congratulated on the excellent way in which he has carried out his difficult task of securing a photographic record of our bird-friends in their native haunts.

I am, Sir,

Yours faithfully,

NILS GYLDENSTOLPE,

Assistant, Vertebrate Department,
R. Nat. Hist. Museum, Stockholm.

20 October, 1916.

Corrections to Dr. van Someren's Paper.

SIR,—Will you kindly publish the following corrections to my papers in 'The Ibis' of April and July 1916:—

Page 220. The type of *Francolinus nahani* is in the Tervueren Museum, near Brussels, *not* Tring.

Page 433. *Macronyx newtoni*, should read *M. wintoni*.

The locality Kyetema, wherever it appears, should read Kyetume.

Yours truly,

Nairobi, Bt. E. Afr.

V. G. L. VAN SOMEREN.

9 November, 1916.

Directive-marks in Nestling's mouths.

SIR,—I have lately seen Dr. Butler's letter in 'The Ibis' for July, and I hasten to offer him my very sincere apologies for a mistake that must have seemed inexcusable; also to express my regret to Mr. Pycraft in the same connection.

I need not go into the reasons for the mistake, which I regret. But I take it that the *application* of the theory, as it was stated in Mr. Pycraft's 'Infancy of Animals' and discussed by Capt. Ingram and myself, is, actually, very largely Mr. Pycraft's. At any rate, I judge from Dr. Butler's letter that his own suggestion was probably limited to such ornamentation as we find (*e.g.*) in the flanges of the beaks of the Estrildinæ. With this much of the view I am in hearty agreement. Capt. Ingram mentions the occurrence of similar ornaments in *Cinclus*, *Parus*, and *Troglodytes* ('Ibis,'

1907, p. 576), and they appear in Mr. Bates's description and Mr. Keuleman's figure of immature *Parmoptila woodhousii*, with a bulky and (one judges) dark nest ('Ibis,' 1909, p. 67).

The further view, that the twin-spot tongue may be similarly explained, remains, I fear, unsupported by my now somewhat numerous special observations and experiments, and it is only necessary to state the birds that possess this tongue—certain Shrikes, Flycatchers, White-eyes, Larks, Turdidæ, and Warblers, mostly birds with open nests—to give point to Capt. Ingram's criticism of the theory in 'The Ibis' for 1907, p. 576. *Macronyx* nestlings too, with the Bearded Tit type of patch, lie in brilliantly-lit nests.

I am free to admit that my own, alternative, explanation as to the use of these markings is as yet by no means proved; but these are, at any rate, facts which tell strongly against the view that they were originally a nestling adaptation at all. I myself feel that they probably represent what was once the adult mouth of a common ancestor, and is now a stage in development that is still well accentuated in those of its descendants to which it continues to be (or has again become) of practical value on the lines I have already suggested ('Ibis,' 1916, pp. 281-284).

Yours truly,

Gungunyana,

Melsetter, Rhodesia.

24 October, 1916.

C. F. M. SWYNNERTON.

Second Oological Dinner.

The second Annual Oological Dinner was held in London at Pagani's Restaurant, on Wednesday, September 13, 1916. Lord Rothschild took the chair at 7 o'clock, Mr. Thomas Parkin acting as Vice-Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN, after some opening remarks, congratulated those present on the wonderful exhibition of eggs on view. He proceeded to exhibit a pair each of the eggs of the Condor (*Sarcorhamphus gryphus*), and of the Californian

Condor (*Pseudogryphus californianus*), the latter now very rare, and fortunately strongly protected. He explained that the eggs of the latter could easily be distinguished by their greenish tinge.

Lord Rothschild also exhibited two clutches of 4, one of 3, and four of 2 eggs of *Falco biarmicus erlangeri*, from southern Algeria and the western Sahara; and one clutch of 3 of *Falco peregrinus pelegrinoides* from Morocco, all fully identified, mostly by shooting one of the parent birds. The eggs of these two Falcons seemed to be indistinguishable.

Dr. ERNST HARTERT, who had collected most of them, made some remarks on their distribution and nesting.

Mr. THOMAS PARKIN exhibited:—

(a) A splendid specimen of the egg of the Great Auk.

(b) Two eggs of the Marsh Harrier, the last ever taken on Whittlesea Merc.

(c) An egg of the Waved Albatross (*Diomedea irrorata*), taken 28 Nov. 1897 by the Webster-Harris expedition on the Galapagos Is., and formerly in the Tring Museum.

(d) Two eggs of the Lammergeyer or Bearded Vulture (*Gypaëtus barbatus*), taken in Spain by Dr. A. C. Stark, 12 Jan. 1884. They are figured (as perhaps the finest and darkest clutch known) by Dresser in his 'Eggs of the Birds of Europe.'

(e) An egg of the Cape Pigeon (*Daption capensis*), taken at the South Orkneys in December 1903 by the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition, and presented to Mr. Parkin by Dr. Bruce, the leader of the expedition.

(f) An egg of the Norwegian Jer-Falcon (*Hierofalco gyrfalco*), taken in West Finmark in 1856 by John Wolley.

(g) A clutch of eggs of McCormick's Skua (*Megalestris maccormicki*), taken on the slopes of Mount Erebus by Scott's Antarctic Expedition in January 1914.

Mr. STUART BAKER exhibited some cases of eggs of the rarer Indian Falconidæ, the majority of which had never been previously exhibited in Europe. Amongst the eggs shown were a fine series of those of *Ictinaëtus malayensis*, taken by Mr. J. Stuart in Travancore, and by Col. Rattray,

Mr. J. Parker, and the exhibitor in northern India; of *Spizaetus kelaerti*, all taken by Mr. Stuart in Travancore; and of *S. nepalensis*, taken by Mr. S. L. Whymper and Colonel Buchanan in the Himalayas.

Mr. Stuart Baker also showed complete series of the eggs of *Falco peregrinator*, *F. severus*, and of *Pernis cristatus*, together with corresponding series of the eggs of their European allies *Falco peregrinus*, *F. subbuteo*, and *Pernis ptilorhynchus*, and commented on their similarities and differences.

Other eggs shown by Mr. Stuart Baker were those of *Lophotriorchis kieneri*, and of the genera *Baza*, *Spizaetus*, and *Spilornis*.

The Rev. F. C. R. JOURDAIN also showed four clutches of the Honey-Buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*) for comparison.

Mr. P. B. SMYTH exhibited:—

(a) A drawer of clutches of eggs of the Corn-Bunting, showing many good varieties.

(b) A fine clutch of eggs of the Hen-Harrier, brightly blotched, and including an abnormally small egg.

Mr. R. W. CHASE exhibited a fine series of British-taken eggs of the following Raptorial birds, showing great variation.

(a) Series of eggs of the Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetus*).

(b) 12 clutches of *Buteo vulgaris*.

1 ditto *Milvus iclinus*.

9 ditto *Falco peregrinus*.

2 ditto *Falco subbuteo*.

6 ditto *Falco aesalon*.

12 ditto *Falco tinnunculus*.

Mr. REGINALD WARE exhibited:—

(a) Two clutches of 6 each of the erythristic type of Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla rayi*), apparently the produce of different birds; both from Romsey marsh, 2 May, 1914, and 14 May, 1916.

(b) A clutch of 11 Blue Tit (*Parus c. obscurus*), exceptionally heavily marked, some of the blotches measuring 10 mm. by 6 mm. (Frant, 20 May, 1908).

Mr. CLIFFORD BORRER exhibited :—

(a) Some picked clutches of British-taken eggs from his own collection, including eggs of the Dartford Warbler (pale eggs), Crossbill (true erythrism ; ground-colour cream with red spots), Greenshank (one large egg heavily marked), Woodcock (heavily marked dark eggs from Ross-shire), Chough (one blotched set, and a normal clutch for comparison ; Kerry), Peregrine Falcon (large eggs), Dotterel (Scotland, dark eggs).

(b) A clutch of 4 eggs of the Nightjar (Norfolk, 1916).

Mr. PERCY F. BUNYARD exhibited the following from his collection :—

Yellow Hammer (*Emberiza citrinella*). A series showing great variation. Among them the following are of special interest :—A clutch of 4 with bluish ground almost without markings. A clutch of 5, exceptionally heavily scrolled reddish brown with large and conspicuous underlying markings. A clutch of 4, with yellowish ground, faintly scrolled pale brown.

Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*). A representative series showing normal types and varieties, among the latter the following were noteworthy :—A clutch of 6, with pure white ground, sparingly marked at the large ends. A clutch of 5, pure white ground heavily zoned. A clutch of 5, heavily zoned at the extreme large ends.

Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), with Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*). A remarkable sequence of 4 clutches from Surrey, all taken within a radius of 50 yards on the following dates : May 27th with 4, and 5 Whitethroat's ; May 31st with 3 do. ; June 24th with 2 do. All those of the Cuckoo are obviously by the same bird.

Mr. Bunyard remarked that though he had lived in a Cuckoo country all his life, he had only once previously found the Whitethroat used as a fosterer.

Sparrow-Hawk (*Accipiter nisus*). Four clutches exceptionally beautifully and heavily marked.

Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*). A clutch of 3 typical but small

eggs from Surrey, and a clutch of 3 of the rarer Kestrel type from Northamptonshire.

Mr. Bunyard remarked that many collectors doubted this latter form, but of recent years it had frequently been taken by well known field-men, and that there could no longer be any doubt on the question.

Merlin (*Falco aesalon*). A very beautiful clutch of 5 from Yorkshire, three of which are heavily pigmented at the large ends and two at the small; the remaining portions are only faintly marked on a creamy white ground.

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*). Two clutches of 5 of the Sparrow-Hawk type, very handsomely marked on a conspicuous white ground, a clutch of 5 very remarkable eggs from Shropshire scrolled chocolate-brown on a pure white ground, resembling Common Buntings in the arrangement of markings, and a clutch of 5 with conspicuous purplish grey underlying markings, giving them a very beautiful appearance.

Redshank (*Totanus totanus*). A clutch of 4 with *greenish* ground faintly marked at large ends; a similar clutch of 3 from Kent boldly blotched and very much like eggs of Spotted Redshank (*Totanus fuscus*).

Ringed Plover (*Ægialitis hiaticula*). Three clutches of 4 most remarkable eggs from Norfolk, all from the same bird in one season, taken on May 9th, June 1st, and June 22nd, showing how great is the persistent desire for reproduction in a species. All three clutches show wonderful uniformity in the markings, shape, and size; they are very heavily pigmented with large blotches of jet-black on a warm creamy white ground; the largest blotch measures $\cdot 525 \times \cdot 875$ inches.

Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*). A clutch of 3 showing true erythrism, from Forfar, and a normal clutch for comparison; ground-colour pale reddish brown, markings rich black-brown.

Razorbill (*Alca torda*). A series of four eggs showing a reddish-grey ground, with numerous purplish grey under-

lying markings, giving them a distinctly purplish appearance, one with bright reddish-brown ground, heavily pigmented with dark brown blotches at the large end, and conspicuous reddish-grey underlying marks, and one unique egg, with buff ground evenly splashed with minute surface markings of dark brown, and minute grey underlying marks.

Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla raii*). A clutch of 6 from Hampshire with green ground.

The Rev. F. C. R. JOURDAIN exhibited:—

(a) A fine series of 12 eggs of the Black Vulture (*Vultur monachus*), taken by himself in the Dobrudja in 1910 and 1911, showing a remarkable range of variation.

(b) A series of 28 eggs of the Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), from various localities, including Swedish Lapland, Germany, Roumania, Andalusia, Morocco, and Japan. The difference in size between eggs from northern and southern localities was very noticeable.

Mr. STAINES BOORMAN exhibited:—

(a) A very fine variety clutch of eggs of the Common Jackdaw.

(b) A set of 7 eggs of the Tree-Pipit.

(c) A most remarkable clutch of heavily blotched eggs of the Oystercatcher, from the western Highlands. Varieties in this species are rarely obtained.

‘The Zoologist.’

The well-known and old-established natural history monthly, ‘The Zoologist,’ having been acquired by Messrs. Witherby & Co., will in future be incorporated with the illustrated monthly magazine, ‘British Birds,’ published by the same firm at 326 High Holborn.

There will be no consequent alteration in the policy of ‘British Birds,’ and it will still treat solely of birds, but its scope will be slightly enlarged to admit a limited number of articles and notes on birds of the western portion of the Palæarctic Region other than British.